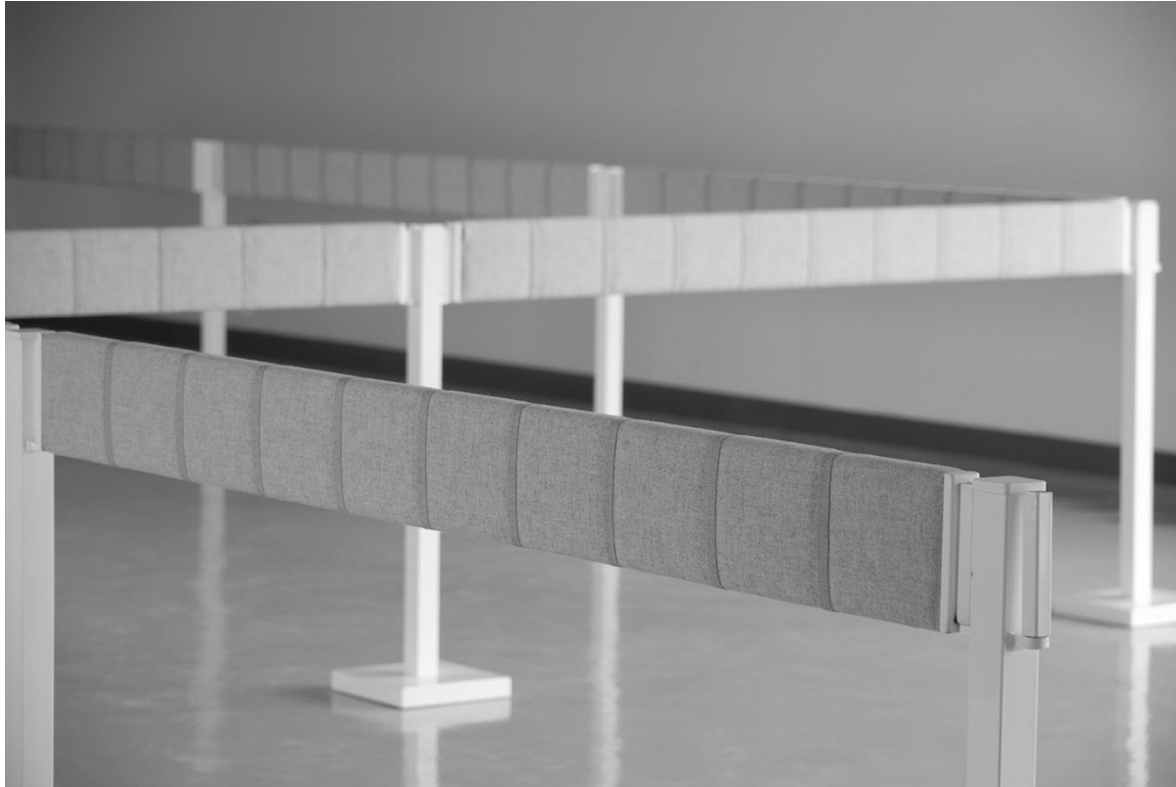


Barrier, ref: 9774-14', various configurations



Barrier, ref: 9774-14', various configurations



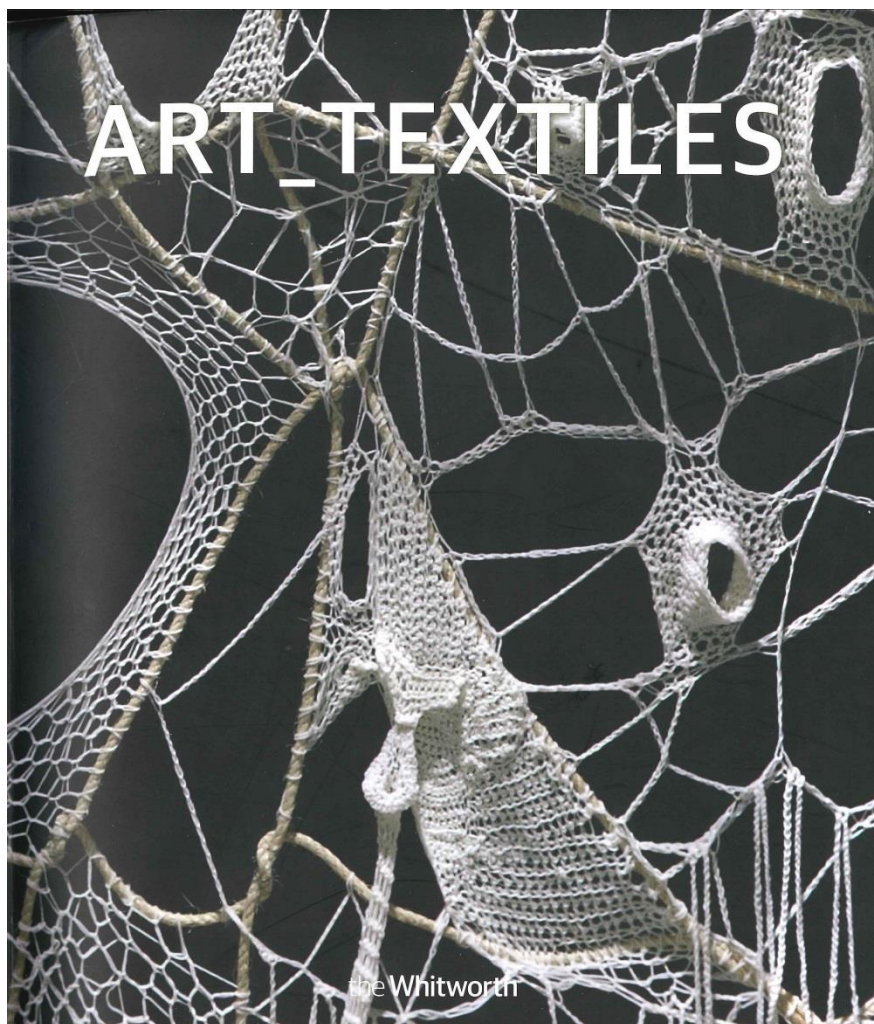
‘Barrier, ref: 9774-14’ Installation *Art_Textiles*, The Whitworth, 10.1015 - 31.1.16



'Barrier, ref: 9774-14' Installation *Art_Textiles*, The Whitworth, 10.1015 - 31.1.16



'Barrier, ref: 9774-14' Installation *Art_Textiles*, The Whitworth, 10.1015 - 31.1.16



Art_Textiles, Catalogue

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Maxine Bristow

Maxine Bristow is an artist, academic and writer whose works embrace textiles, sculpture and installation. Over the past two decades she has made works that at first glance appear minimal but which are, in fact, both technically and conceptually complex and layered with meaning. Her work has a quietly unsettling quality that questions the labour, value and perception of textiles.

From the mid-1990s Bristow made a series of wall-mounted bags using muted grey fabrics. Works such as *Square Correlation No 2* and *3x19: Intersecting a Seam* are decorated with repeating and meticulously sewn closed buttonholes with no buttons, rendering them useless, much like the bags themselves. Their surfaces are primed with gesso, as you would a canvas, and then cracked to give them a stiff quality. They appear to be somewhere between a painting, textile and sculpture, representing Bristow's desire to confront the artificial boundaries between fine art and craft.

In the first decade of this century her work began to take the form of various aspects of the institutional architecture that we encounter every day. As with her bags, Bristow uses time-consuming textile techniques to create light switches, head rests and handrails that force the viewer to double-take, not sure if they are encountering a work of art or a functional object. This uncertainty is particularly present in her work *Barrier* ref 9774-14, a series of 10 intricately darned barriers that appear to function as a boundary or handrail. Interested in the way that people respond to objects in different spaces and contexts, Bristow comments that: 'As a support, the handrail directs us through space, but it also operates as a barrier which divides space, defines boundaries and alternately either denies or allows access.'¹

Notes

- 1 Maxine Bristow, '3 - Arbitrary Divisions' www.maxinebristow.com (accessed 3 September 2015).

Born 1962 in Bolton, UK
Lives and works in Chester, UK

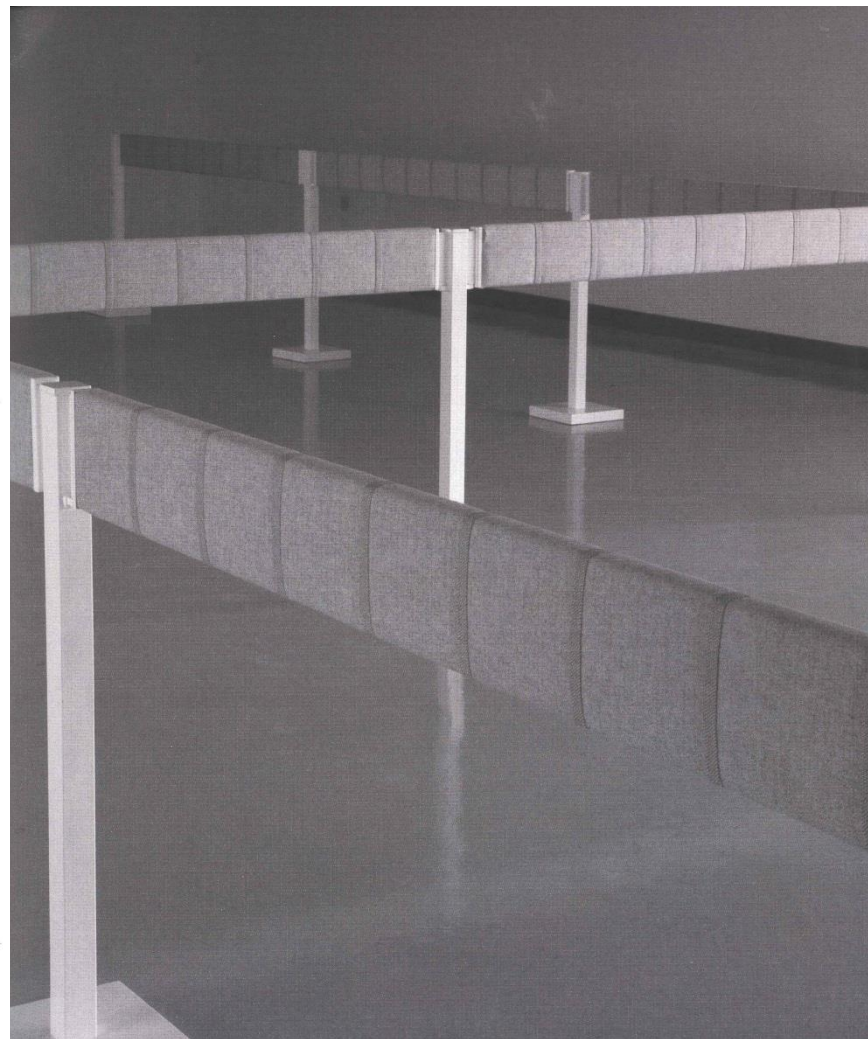
Selected exhibitions

- 2013 *Concordance*, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK (solo)
- 2013 *Cloth & Memory (2)*, Salts Mill, Saltaire, UK (catalogue)
- 2011 *Z Depth Buffer*, 5 Years Gallery, London, UK
- 2011 *Transformations*, Smiths Row Gallery, Bury St Edmunds, UK
- 2008 *Cloth & Culture NOW*, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich and Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK (catalogue)

Selected bibliography

- 2014 Rhannon Williams, 'Maxine Bristow: Concordance, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester', *Textile Journal of Cloth and Culture*, 12(2), pp. 228-33
- 2012 Maxine Bristow, 'Continuity of Touch - Textile as Silent Witness' in Jessica Hemmings, ed., *The Textile Reader* (Oxford: Berg), pp. 44-51
- 2006 Maxine Bristow and Melanie Kidd, eds., *Maxine Bristow Sensual Austerity* (Cleford: The Hub, National Centre for Craft & Design)
- 2004 Maxine Bristow, 'Material Trace: Marking Time and Defining Space' in *Through the Surface: Collaborating Textile Artists from Britain and Japan* (Farnham: The Surrey Institute of Art and Design), pp. 58-9

Maxine Bristow, *Barrier* ref: 9774-14, 2005



Foreword

Maria Balshaw, Director of the Whitworth and Manchester City Galleries

Textiles have been part of the Whitworth's story since the foundation of the gallery in 1889. In that year the first major acquisitions by the fledgling institution were two tapestry panels, *Flora* and *Pomona*, by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. These works marked the significance of textiles for the Whitworth and for Manchester. They were also an important piece of contemporary art and, as such, they set a direction of travel for the gallery that has been maintained throughout its 126-year history. It is a unique feature of the Whitworth that is carried forward in our newly expanded building.

The reasons for this are not hard to understand. Textiles made Manchester's fortune, and that of the merchants and mill owners who amassed great wealth and became the philanthropists who helped create the cultural institutions that helped the city accrue cultural influence and power. The founders of the Whitworth, Robert Darbishire, C. P. Scott and William Agnew, were not complacent about Manchester's world-leading position in the later 19th century. They felt that designers and manufacturers in the textile industry should be exposed to the very best examples of cloth from across the world. The world textile collection at the Whitworth was conceived with this in mind and we still collect textiles from across the globe, most particularly from those parts of the world to which Manchester's trading history connects most strongly – South Asia and West Africa.

Through the 20th century, the Whitworth continued to collect not just examples of historic excellence, nor just textiles made by leading makers and artists, but also industrial design, where it was groundbreaking and innovative, textiles that respond to social change and those that demonstrate technological or material excellence. This is entirely fitting for us as part of the University of Manchester, where material science is one of the leading research areas. We enjoy a productive and unique relationship with scientific colleagues there, as well as providing a resource for its students. As a comprehensive world collection of design excellence we are also a tremendous resource for students and researchers at Manchester Metropolitan University, where practice-based textile programmes are a real strength.

In the past decade the Whitworth has been recognized particularly for that early specialism – textiles that sit between art and textile practice. As this exhibition rightly demonstrates, cloth and its use by artists has, more than most materials, troubled easy oppositions of art versus craft, the artist and the maker. The curatorial focus at the Whitworth over the past ten years has sought to document this movement – entirely appropriate for a gallery that holds both textiles and modern and contemporary art in its collection. This focus has been pre-eminently the work of Deputy Director Jennifer Harris, whose expertise and authority in this field is recognized worldwide. With the support of her textile

colleagues at the Whitworth, Frances Pritchard and Amy George, her research has enriched the collection immeasurably and finds its fullest expression in this major exhibition. The exhibition holds to the world focus of the Whitworth's collection but it also speaks of an appropriately Mancunian local conscience. It was not intentional that the majority of artists in this exhibition are women, but nevertheless pleasing that in the original suffragette city much of this work expresses or engages specifically feminist ideas.

I would like to thank Jennifer for bringing together the last decade of her deep knowledge and arch into artist-led textile practice into such a visually extraordinary and politically proactive exhibition. This is truly a uniquely Whitworth sort of show.



Previous configuration, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Revealed Exhibition, 17.9.05 - 27.11.05



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